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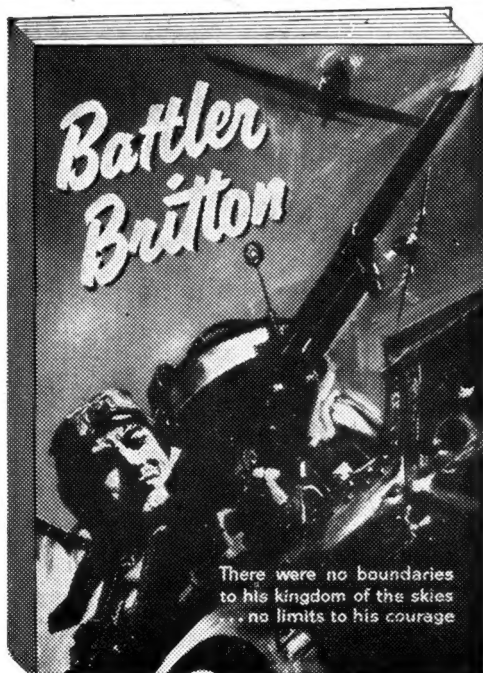
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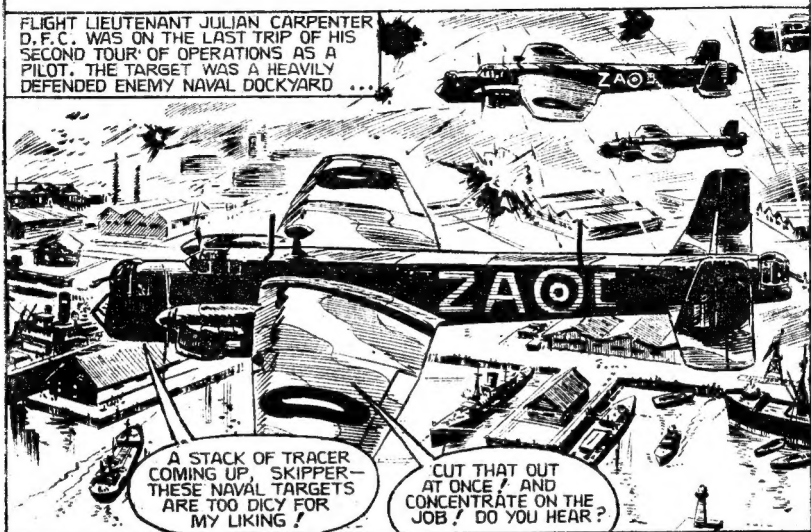
ACES HIGH

IT IS SAID THAT THE TESTING-GROUND OF WAR EITHER MAKES OR BREAKS A MAN — THAT IT SHOWS HIM UP FOR WHAT HE REALLY IS. THE LONG STRAIN OF BATTLE BROKE MANY MEN. BUT THERE WERE OTHERS WHO FOUND IN IT THEIR TRUE SELVES, AND REALISED THE REAL NATURE OF THEIR COURAGE.



Chapter 1. SPECIAL CREW

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JULIAN CARPENTER D.F.C. WAS ON THE LAST TRIP OF HIS SECOND TOUR OF OPERATIONS AS A PILOT. THE TARGET WAS A HEAVILY DEFENDED ENEMY NAVAL DOCKYARD ...



A STACK OF TRACER COMING UP, SKIPPER—THESE NAVAL TARGETS ARE TOO DICY FOR MY LIKING!

CUT THAT OUT AT ONCE! AND CONCENTRATE ON THE JOB! DO YOU HEAR?

IT WAS WITH A RASPING VOICE THAT JULIAN SILENCED HIS GUNNER—MAINLY TO HIDE HIS OWN FEELINGS. THE OTHERS MUST NOT KNOW HOW THE SWEAT DRIPPED DOWN HIS FACE, HOW EVERY NERVE-END SEEMED TO QUIVER WITH SUPPRESSED FEAR.

IT'S WORSE EVERY TIME... IF ONLY WE CAN GET SAFELY HOME JUST ONCE MORE I...



HOLD IT AS YOU GO, SKIPPER! JUST A BIT LONGER... BOMBS GONE!

THE CUMBERSOME WHITLEY BROKE UPWARDS. THEN IT WAS BY INSTINCT THAT THE PILOT SUDDENLY SWERVED AS HE SENSED THE PRESENCE OF THE 88mm. GUN FAR BELOW. THERE WAS A GREAT CRACKING EXPLOSION IN THE AIR BEHIND AND BESIDE THEM.

WOW! WHAT A WIZARD TARGET FROM THE TAIL! GOT THE BRUTE!

MISSED US BY INCHES! BY GUM, SKIP—HOW DID YOU DO IT?

JULIAN'S REPUTATION AS A PILOT WAS OF THE HIGHEST. NO ONE KNEW THAT FOR HIM, EACH TIME HE TOUCHED DOWN AND FELT SOLID EARTH UNDER HIS FEET AGAIN, IT WAS LIKE BEING RE-BORN.

I DODGED BECAUSE I WAS SCARED... I'M CRACKING... AND ALL THEY DO IS DECORATE ME...

SAY, CHAPS—YOU CAN SMELL THE GRASS ALREADY! ISN'T IT LOVELY?

HOME, SWEET HOME!

JULIAN COULD NOT FACE THE OTHERS AT THAT MOMENT AS HE WALKED AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT ALONE. BUT HE HEARD A REMARK FROM THE REAR-GUNNER...

KNOW WHAT THE SKIPPER GOT GONGED FOR? NEVER SAYS. AND BEFORE MY TIME. ALL I KNOW IS - HE ALWAYS BRINGS US HOME AGAIN.

IF ONLY HE KNEW... JUST FOR SO MANY OPS, AND STAYING ALIVE.

OH, HULLO, ADJ. WHAT'S UP?

THE ADJUTANT TOLD HIM HE WAS WANTED IN THE C.O.'S OFFICE AFTER DE-BRIEFING. JULIAN'S HEART SANK. SURELY IT COULD NOT BE ANOTHER JOB?

WHATEVER IT IS - I'VE GOT TO KEEP GOING. IF THEY FIND OUT I'M IN A FUNK... ANYWAY, THERE ARE WORSE JOBS THAN A PILOT'S. LOOK AT THE TAIL-GUNNER - ALL ALONE, A SITTING TARGET FOR EVERY ENEMY FIGHTER! OH WELL, LET'S GET IT OVER WITH.

JULIAN DID NOT KNOW IT, BUT HE WAS SHORTLY GOING TO BE PILOTING ONE OF THE MOST RENOWNED TAIL-GUNNERS IN THE R.A.F., FLIGHT SERGEANT "TAIL-END" CHARLIE MORGAN.

TAKE THA' YE FILTHY, SNEAKING HUN... AND TELL THE OTHERS I GOT YE FIRST... THA' YE PICKED ON CHARLIE MORGAN FROM THE CLYDE!



CHARLIE WAS FAMOUS—FOR HIS "CATS' EYES" AND ALSO HIS TEMPER. THE LITTLE SCOTSMAN HAD ALREADY EARNED A D.F.M., WITH A CONFIRMED TOTAL OF FIFTEEN ENEMY FIGHTERS—A VERY HIGH SCORE FOR AN AIR-GUNNER.

HEADING FOR HOME NOW! YOU ONLY GOT ONE TONIGHT, 'TAIL-END'! YOU'RE SLIPPING!



AM I BLINKING HECK! IT'S YOUR FAULT IF I DON'T GET INTO POSITION!

KEEP YOUR HAIR ON, CHARLIE! THE SKIPPER'S ONLY PULLING YOUR LEG!

WITH ANYONE ELSE, CHARLIE'S TERRIBLE TEMPER WOULD HAVE BEEN PUT DOWN TO NERVES. BUT HE WAS NOT VISIBLY AFRAID OF ANYTHING—ON LAND OR IN THE AIR.

CUT THE CACKLE—
BANDIT AT SEVEN
O'CLOCK!

HONESTLY,
HE GETS WORSE
EVERY DAY,
SKIPPER!



SUDDENLY THEY WERE ALL ON THE ALERT AGAIN. BANTER WAS FORGOTTEN...

TURNING
ACROSS HIM,
CHARLIE... HE'S
ALL YOURS!

ROGER!
SEEN HIM!
HERE HE
COMES!



THE TRUTH WAS—CHARLIE'S TEMPER WAS GETTING WORSE. HE HAD RECENTLY DEVELOPED A SECRET HORROR THAT HAD BEGUN TO SET HIS NERVES ON EDGE. IT SUDDENLY CAME UPON HIM AGAIN NOW—AS THE MESSERSCHMITT CLOSED IN.

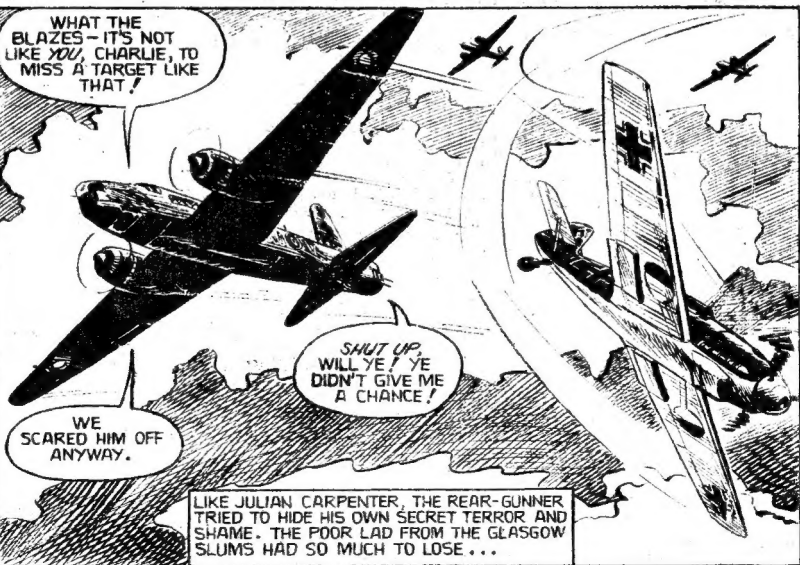
GREAT HEAVENS!
I CANNA SEE IT!



OF ALL THINGS, THE CRACK
REAR-GUNNER HAD BEGUN
TO GET DOUBLE VISION!



WHAT THE
BLAZES - IT'S NOT
LIKE YOU, CHARLIE, TO
MISS A TARGET LIKE
THAT!



SHUT UP,
WILL YE! YE
DIDN'T GIVE ME
A CHANCE!

WE
SCARED HIM OFF
ANYWAY.

LIKE JULIAN CARPENTER, THE REAR-GUNNER
TRIED TO HIDE HIS OWN SECRET TERROR AND
SHAME. THE POOR LAD FROM THE GLASGOW
SLUMS HAD SO MUCH TO LOSE...

HE HAD FOUND UNDREAMED FAME AS AN ACE GUNNER — IT WAS HIS WHOLE LIFE AND HIS WHOLE FUTURE. AT THE DE-BRIEFING, HE LISTENED TO THE CHEERFUL EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE OTHERS — WITH ENVY AND EVEN HATRED.

I KNOW WHAT I'LL DO AFTER THE WAR — TAKE IT EASY, AND GO FISHING... OR GET A NICE QUIET JOB IN THE CITY.



CURSE THESE BLINKING OFFICERS — W! THEIR MONEY AN' THEIR EDUCATION!

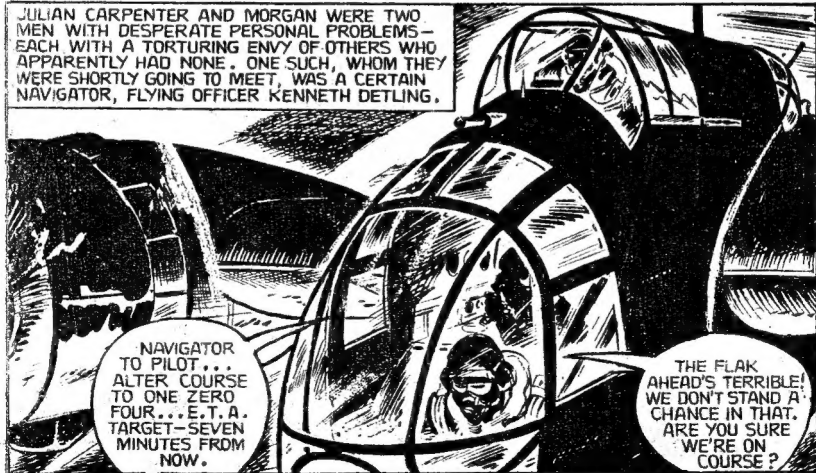
CHARLIE MORGAN FELT THE ANGER RISING IN HIM AGAIN. THEN THERE WAS AN INTERRUPTION AND TO HIS HORROR, HE SAW TWO ADJUTANTS IN THE DOORWAY.

EXCUSE ME, CHAPS! FLIGHT SERGEANT MORGAN'S WANTED BY THE C.O.



NOW WHA' AAGH! I'VE GO' IT AGAIN! WHA'EVER IT IS... CHANCE FOR PROMOTION OR NEW JOB — THEY MUSTNA FIND OUT ABOUT MA EYES!

JULIAN CARPENTER AND MORGAN WERE TWO MEN WITH DESPERATE PERSONAL PROBLEMS — EACH WITH A TORTURING ENVY OF OTHERS WHO APPARENTLY HAD NONE. ONE SUCH, WHOM THEY WERE SHORTLY GOING TO MEET, WAS A CERTAIN NAVIGATOR, FLYING OFFICER KENNETH DETLING.



NAVIGATOR TO PILOT... ALTER COURSE TO ONE ZERO FOUR... E.T.A. TARGET—SEVEN MINUTES FROM NOW.

THE FLAK AHEAD'S TERRIBLE! WE DON'T STAND A CHANCE IN THAT. ARE YOU SURE WE'RE ON COURSE?



DETLING REPORTED TO THE COMMANDING OFFICER IN HIS OFFICE...

... AND THE OIL GAUGE WAS ONLY DOWN A DEGREE OR TWO. I GAVE THEM A PERFECT COURSE. IT WAS UP TO THE PILOT AND THE BOMB-AIMER.

REMEMBER THEY'RE NEW TO IT, DETLING. IT'S THE THIRD CREW YOU'VE REPORTED, AND I'M WORRIED ABOUT LOSING TOO MANY—POTENTIALLY ANYWAY—REASONABLE AIRCREW. BUT, OF COURSE, I'LL HAVE TO TAKE ACTION ON WHAT YOU SAY...

AFTER DETLING HAD LEFT, THE C.O. AIRED HIS OWN VIEWS TO HIS ADJUTANT...

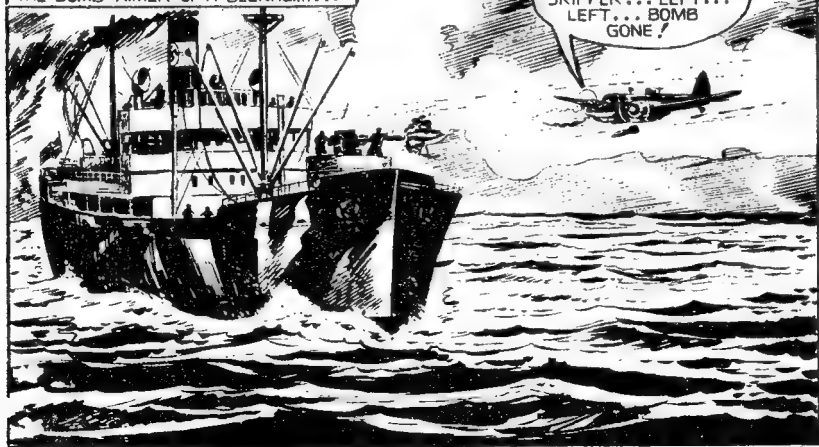
DETLING'S ALWAYS RIGHT. I' ALMOST WISH HE'D MAKE A MISTAKE HIMSELF SOMETIMES. HOW HIS CREWS MUST *HATE* HIM—BUT HE'S A CRACKING FINE NAVIGATOR. YES! WHO IS IT?

BOMBER COMMAND, SIR! PERSONAL FOR YOU!

WHAT BOMBER COMMAND HAD TO SAY CURIOUSLY ENOUGH CONCERNED DETLING—AND ALSO ONE OTHER CHARACTER WE HAVE TO MEET IN THIS STORY.

PILOT OFFICER "COCKY" PARKER WAS THE BOMB-AIMER OF A BLENHEIM...

DOWN A BIT, SKIPPER... LEFT... LEFT... BOMB GONE!



ONE OF THE FIRST BOMB AIMERS TO HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED, HE HAD A WELL-DESERVED REPUTATION FOR UNCANNY ACCURACY—AND HE KNEW IT.



LIKE KENNETH DETLING, COCKY PARKER WAS ALWAYS DEAD RIGHT...

THERE'S NO ONE TO TOUCH ME—ON EITHER SIDE—YOU KNOW, CHAPS, I RECKON I'M FLIPPING WIZARD. IF IT WASN'T...

FOR PETE'S SAKE, SHUT UP! WE'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE!



COCKY PARKER WAS ALSO A TRAINED RADIO-OPERATOR AND HAD A DUAL ROLE IN THE BLENHEIM...

WHEN YOU'VE *QUITE* FINISHED - SIGNING YOUR OWN AUTOGRAPH BOOK - WOULD YOU FAVOUR US BY COMING BACK TO THE RADIO. WE WANT TO CHECK A COURSE FOR HOME.

OKAY, SKIP!
JUST LEAVE IT
TO UNCLE!

GOOD. THANK YOU - AND BY THE WAY, COCKY, YOU'RE WANTED BY THE OLD MAN WHEN WE GET BACK. FORGOT TO TELL YOU.

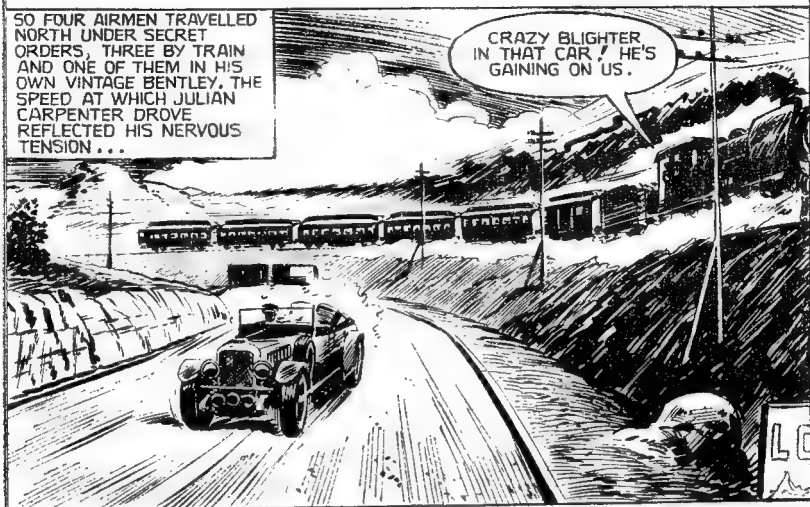
WHAT'S IT FOR, SKIP? DO YOU THINK IT'S A GONG?

LET'S HOPE IT'S A POSTING! THEN SOME OTHER POOR BLIGHTERS CAN HAVE YOUR COCKY YACKETY-YACK!



Chapter 2. POINT OF TENSION

SO FOUR AIRMEN TRAVELLED NORTH UNDER SECRET ORDERS, THREE BY TRAIN AND ONE OF THEM IN HIS OWN VINTAGE BENTLEY. THE SPEED AT WHICH JULIAN CARPENTER DROVE REFLECTED HIS NERVOUS TENSION...



ODDLY ENOUGH, THE THREE WHO TRAVELLED BY TRAIN OCCUPIED THE SAME COMPARTMENT.

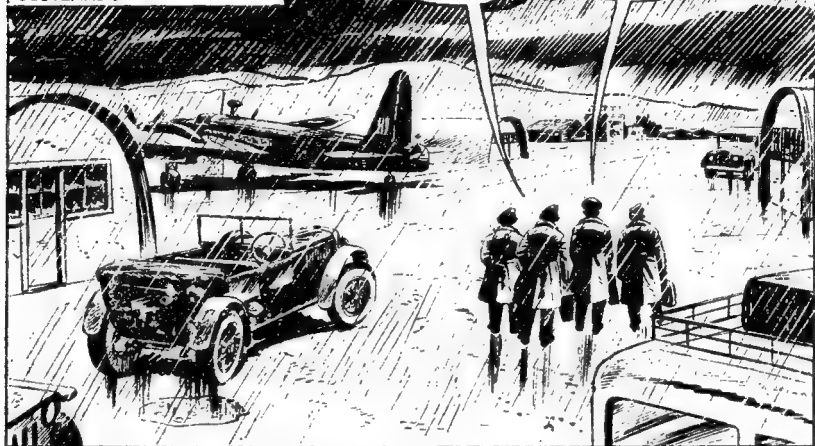


DETTELING DISAPPROVED OF SERVICEMEN DURING THE WAR WHO TALKED TOO MUCH.

THEY ALL FOUR EVENTUALLY FOUND THEMSELVES AT AN EXTREMELY DESOLATE LOOKING AIRFIELD NEAR THE NORTHERNMOST TIP OF SCOTLAND.

CHEERFUL SPOT ISN'T IT? WONDER WHAT WE'RE HERE FOR?

WE'RE ORDERED HERE — AND THAT'S THAT!



SOON THEY FOUND THEMSELVES WELCOMED BY, OF ALL PEOPLE, AN AIR VICE-MARSHAL — SIR GRAHAM CRUMBIE.

EACH OF YOU HAS BEEN SPECIALLY RECOMMENDED FOR A SPECIAL JOB OF THE VERY HIGHEST IMPORTANCE. IT WILL BE VERY DANGEROUS AND ANY OF YOU CAN BACK OUT NOW IF YOU WANT TO.



NO ONE STIRRED AND CRUMBIE WENT ON TO TELL THEM HOW THEY MUST TRAIN TOGETHER FOR VERY SPECIAL FLYING, HOW THEY MUST BE 'SPOT ON' IN A WEEK FOR TIME WAS INCREDIBLY SHORT.

I'M SORRY TO TAKE YOU AWAY FROM YOUR SQUADRONS. BIT OF A WRENCH. LEAVING OLD FRIENDS...

OH, THAT'S ALL RIGHT, SIR.

DETLING, AT LEAST, WAS AWARE OF HIS UNPOPULARITY.

THEN THE AIR VICE-MARSHAL TOOK THEM OUT TO THEIR AIRCRAFT. IT WAS A WELLINGTON STRIPPED OF ITS FRONT TURRET AND WITH SPECIALLY TUNED UP ENGINES FOR EXTRA SPEED.

WHEN ARE THE REST OF THE CREW COMING, SIR? WE'RE SHORT.

NO, CARPENTER, YOU'VE GOT TO LEARN TO DO WITH FOUR.

PARKER CAN ALSO HANDLE A RADIO. WEIGHT IS BEING CUT DOWN TO THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM - PARTLY FOR EXTRA FUEL, AND PARTLY - WELL, YOU'LL LEARN LATER. NOW GO AWAY, AND SHAKE DOWN.

AFTERWARDS IN PRIVATE, CRUMBIE RE-STATED HIS SATISFACTION.

WELL, NOW TO AWAIT THE NEW BOMB...! WE'VE GOT OUR CREW. EACH HAND-PICKED FOR HIS OUTSTANDING REPUTATION AT HIS OWN JOB... THEY OUGHT TO GET ALONG SPLENDIDLY TOGETHER.

THEY SAY THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN ORGANISATION IS THE HUMAN ELEMENT... WE'RE ALREADY OVER OUR WORST HURDLE THEN, SIR.

BUT WERE THEY? IT WAS A POET COUNTRYMAN OF MORGAN'S WHO ONCE SAID "THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES, O' MICE AN' MEN GANG AFT AGLEY."

LATER, THE THREE OFFICERS OF THE CREW FOUND THEMSELVES TRYING TO WEIGH EACH OTHER UP, EACH CONSCIOUS OF HIS OWN SECRET.

I KNOW NO MORE THAN YOU DO, CHAPS... BUT IT'S LIKELY TO BE A HOT RECEPTION... STILL, I EXPECT YOU'RE PRETTY USED TO HEAVY FLAK, MICK.

NOT ME! ISOLATED NAVAL TARGETS MOSTLY, OLD BOY! STILL, *NOTHING* EVER WORRIES ME!



JULIAN FELT ABASHED AT THE OTHER'S READY COURAGE, BUT DETLING WAS EYING COCKY PARKER, REMEMBERING HOW HE HAD TALKED TOO MUCH ON THE TRAIN.

I'M NOT THE IMAGINATIVE TYPE. YOU SEE A FEW KITES IN FLAMES. THINK IT'S GOING TO BE *YOU* NEXT... TO HECK WITH IT! IT WON'T HAPPEN TO *ME*!



FLAMES... YOU KNOW, FIRE IS SOMETHING YOU JUST CAN'T CALCULATE.

JULIAN, AT THE TIME, CONSIDERED IT A STRANGE REMARK OF DETLING'S, BUT HE THOUGHT NO MORE ABOUT IT.

FLIGHT SERGEANT MORGAN, OF COURSE, COULD NOT MESS WITH THE OTHERS. BUT FOR THE MOMENT HE HAD SOMETHING ELSE ON HIS MIND. IT WAS THE SECOND TIME HE HAD UNOFFICIALLY SOUGHT MEDICAL OPINION.

I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING WRONG! BUT IF YOU SAY IT'S PERIODIC I SHOULD SEE SOME OF YOUR OWN PEOPLE ABOUT IT, OLD CHAP. I DON'T THINK YOU OUGHT TO GO ON FLYING!



BUT THAT WAS SOMETHING THAT CHARLIE WAS CERTAINLY *NOT* GOING TO DO. ARRIVING BACK AT THE AIRFIELD, THE SIGHT OF THE OVER-BEARING DETLING INFURIATED HIM—AND SUDDENLY HE GOT HIS DOUBLE VISION AGAIN.

FOR PETE'S SAKE, MORGAN, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? WE'RE ALL WAITING FOR YOU. TRAINING FLIGHT ORDERED AS SOON AS WE'RE READY. GET YOUR KIT AND HURRY!



A FEW MINUTES LATER, DASHING OUT OF THE CREW ROOM, CHARLIE TURNED BACK FOR HIS GOGGLES.

NEVER MIND YOUR GOGGLES! I'VE GOT A SPARE PAIR... THE OTHERS ARE ALREADY ABOARD. COME ON!

I MUST HAVE MA OWN, I TELL YE!



CHARLIE FELT HE HAD TO HAVE HIS OWN—HE HAD RECENTLY HAD THEM SPECIALLY MADE BY A 'QUACK' IN GLASGOW.

IF ANYONE HAD KNOWN THAT CHARLIE MORGAN NOW HAD BI-FOCAL LENSES IN HIS GOGGLES, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A STORMY INVESTIGATION. BUT THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE HAD THEM COMFORTED CHARLIE.



AS USUAL, DETLING'S THOUGHTS WERE CRITICAL OF HIS FELLOW AIRMEN...



SKIMMING THE LAKES, FLYING THROUGH VALLEYS, THEY MIGHT ESCAPE DETECTION FROM THE AIR OR BY RADAR WHEN THE OPERATION WAS ON.



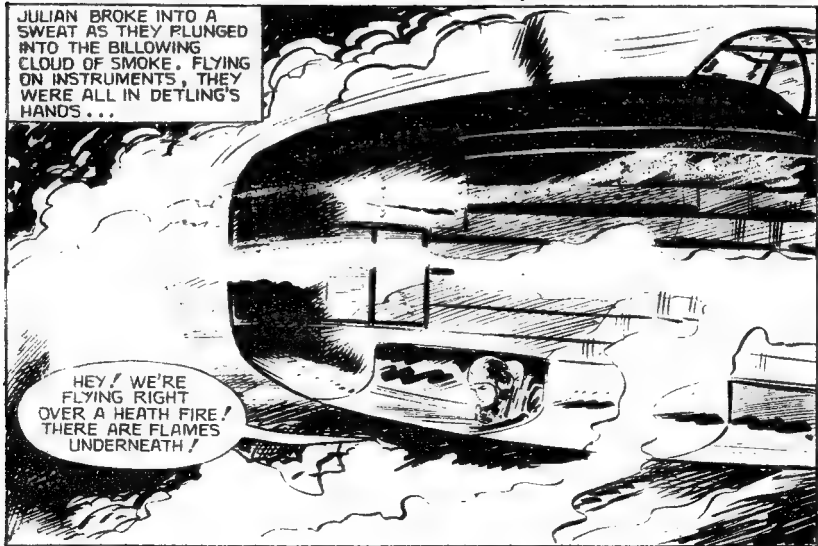
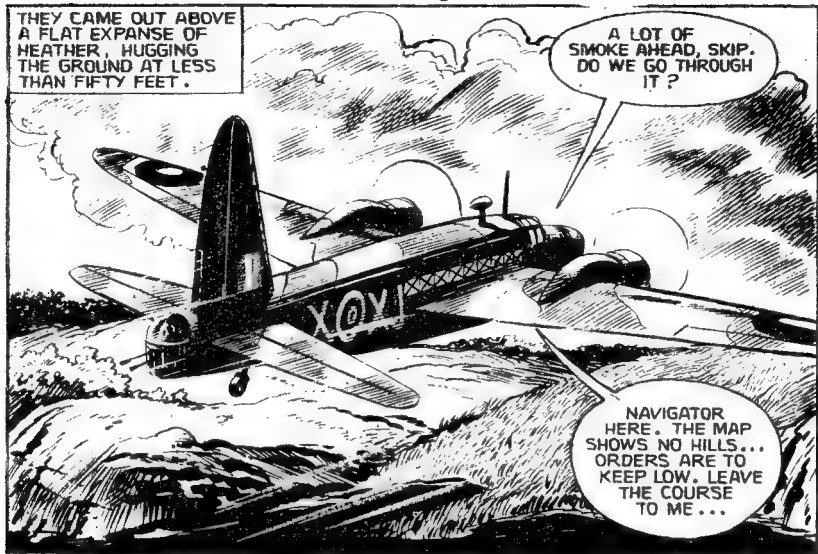
THEY CAME OUT ABOVE A FLAT EXpanse OF HEATHER, HUGGING THE GROUND AT LESS THAN FIFTY FEET.

A LOT OF SMOKE AHEAD, SKIP. DO WE GO THROUGH IT?

NAVIGATOR HERE. THE MAP SHOWS NO HILLS... ORDERS ARE TO KEEP LOW. LEAVE THE COURSE TO ME...

JULIAN BROKE INTO A SWEAT AS THEY PLUNGED INTO THE BILLOWING CLOUD OF SMOKE. FLYING ON INSTRUMENTS, THEY WERE ALL IN DETLING'S HANDS...

HEY! WE'RE FLYING RIGHT OVER A HEATH FIRE! THERE ARE FLAMES UNDERNEATH!



SUDDENLY THERE CAME AN ELECTRIFYING SHOUT FROM DETLING.

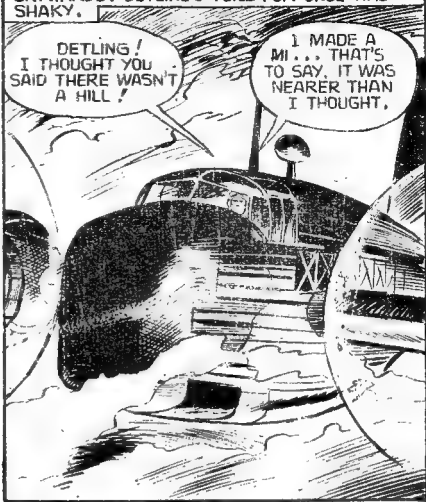
PULL UP THE
NOSE, SKIPPER...!
CLIMB...! CLIMB...!
THERE'S A HILL!



JULIAN'S REFLEXES WERE INSTANTANEOUS. HE HAULED DESPERATELY WITH ALL HIS WEIGHT ON THE STICK AND THE WELLINGTON REARED SKYWARDS. DETLING'S VOICE FOR ONCE WAS SHAKY.

DETLING!
I THOUGHT YOU
SAID THERE WASN'T
A HILL!

I MADE A
MILE... THAT'S
TO SAY, IT WAS
NEARER THAN
I THOUGHT.



THE NEXT MOMENT THEY BROKE
CLEAR — STILL OVER PERFECTLY
FLAT GROUND.

THERE'S NO
BLINKING HILL
ANYWHERE!





VERY SOON THEY HAD ORGANISED A DARTS' MATCH AGAINST THE LOCALS. AND WHEN COCKY THREW A BULL - HE LET EVERYONE KNOW IT, WITH HIS USUAL TACTLESSNESS.

WHAT DID I TELL YOU! IT TAKES SLICK MICK TO TEACH THESE YOKEL JOCKS TO PLAY DARTS... ANYWAY, WHO'D LIVE IN A ONE-HORSE SLUM LIKE THIS.

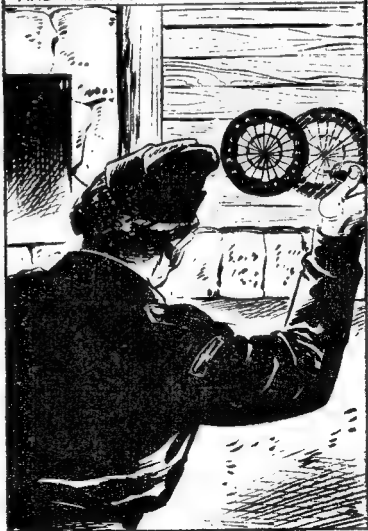


CHARLIE MORGAN, HIMSELF A SCOTSMAN FROM REAL SLUMS, IMMEDIATELY LOST HIS TEMPER. COCKY WAS TOO PROUD TO RETRACT, HE ONLY BLUNDERED ON...

AND YOU'RE ONE OF THEM, CHARLIE - ALL SCOTTIES ARE YOKELS! ALL RIGHT, TAIL-END CHARLIE, YOU BEAT THAT! THROW BETTER THAN BOMB-AIMER MICK!

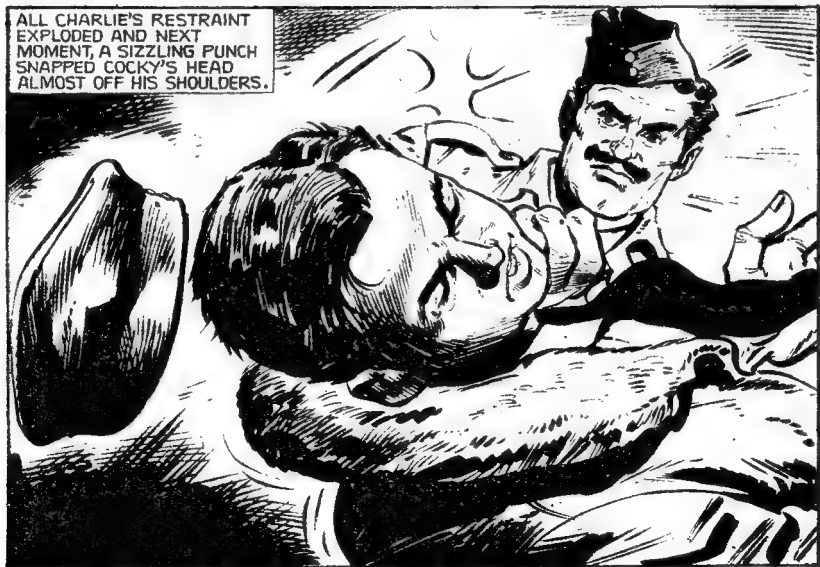


CHARLIE COULD NOT REFUSE THE CHALLENGE - BUT HE ONLY HELD HIS TEMPER BACK BY A SUPREME EFFORT. HE TOOK THE FIRST DART, AND THEN...





ALL CHARLIE'S RESTRAINT
EXPLODED AND NEXT
MOMENT, A SIZZLING PUNCH
SNAPPED COCKY'S HEAD
ALMOST OFF HIS SHOULDERS.



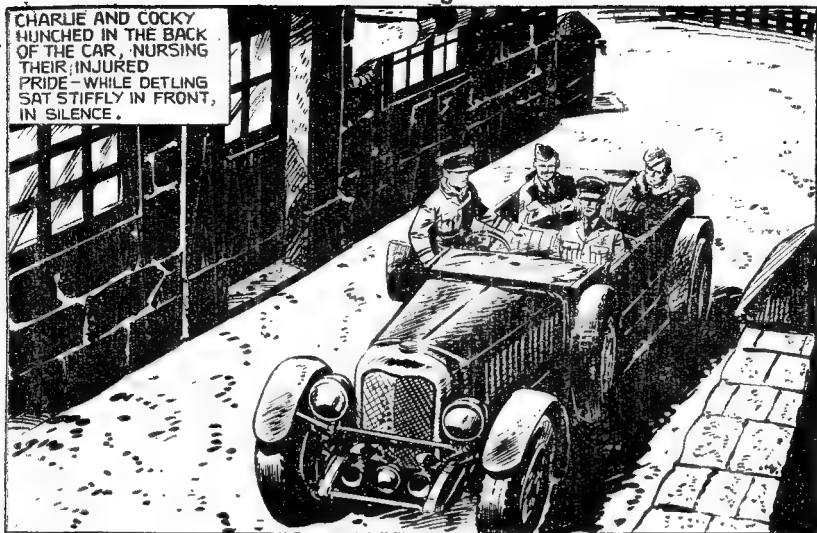
DETLING STEPPED FORWARD INSTANTLY, OFFICIOUS AS EVER...



THE THUMP AS COCKY HIT THE FLOOR SWUNG JULIAN ROUND AND HE INTERRUPTED VEHEMENTLY.



CHARLIE AND COCKY
HUNCHED IN THE BACK
OF THE CAR, NURSING
THEIR INJURED
PRIDE - WHILE DETLING
SAT STIFFLY IN FRONT,
IN SILENCE.



JULIAN SENT THE BIG BENTLEY
RACING THROUGH THE DARK
COUNTRYSIDE, HIS *OWN*
PENT-UP NERVES CLOSE TO
SNAPPING.

I SAY,
STEADY ON,
SKIPPER -
WE'RE DOING
NINETY!

PERHAPS A
COMMON DANGER WILL
BRING YOU ALL TO
YOUR SENSES!



THEIR STRAINED MOODY SILENCE WAS MAINTAINED IN THE AIR THE NEXT DAY, THEY WERE TO PRACTISE HIGH-LEVEL PRECISION BOMBING, WITH DUMMIES OF A NEW TYPE.

PILOT TO CREW... WE MAKE A STRAIGHT RUN-IN OVER THE RANGE AT EXACTLY EIGHTEEN THOUSAND FEET. ARE YOU OKAY WITH THE NEW BOMB-SIGHT, BOMB-AIMER? ALLOWANCE OF THIRTY YARDS ERROR ONLY... OVER!

BOMB-AIMER TO PILOT... LEAVE IT TO ME, SIR!

THEY HAD LEARNED SOMETHING ABOUT THE BOMB THEY WERE TO CARRY. A NEW TYPE, HARDENED AND SHAPED FOR DEEP PENETRATION WITH A DELAY FUSE OF SEVEN SECONDS.

NAVIGATOR HERE... ON COURSE NOW... BOMBING-RANGE ONE-MILE AHEAD.

BOMB-AIMER TO PILOT... SEEN THE SMOKE MARKERS... STEADY AS YOU GO...

THE BOMB'S DESTRUCTIVE POWER WAS REPORTED TO BE TERRIFIC...

BOMB GONE! SLAP ON TARGET!





WE KNOW THE GERMANS ARE BUILDING THEIR FIRST REACTOR DEEP IN THE HEART OF NORWAY'S MOUNTAINS. AGENTS TELL US IT WILL MATURE VERY SHORTLY. IF IT DOES—THEY'RE AHEAD OF US. IF SOMETHING SERIOUS HAPPENED TO IT—THEY WOULD BE PUT BACK PERHAPS TWO YEARS. THAT IS *YOUR* JOB—AND YOU CAN SEE WHY IT'S DESPERATELY IMPORTANT.



THAT NIGHT IN THE MESS JULIAN SAT ALONE IN A CORNER—ALMOST OVERWHELMED BY WHAT HE HAD BEEN TOLD. HIS CREW'S NERVES WERE EVEN MORE AT FEVER PITCH, FOR THEY WERE ALREADY AT READINESS FOR THE MYSTERY OPERATION WAITING ONLY FOR SUITABLE WEATHER.



THIS TERRIBLE STRAIN BETWEEN US ALL JUST CAN'T GO ON! SOMETHING'S GOT TO BREAK!

AT THAT MOMENT, THE YOUTHFUL "COCKY" PARKER—IN MORE NERVOUS HIGH-SPIRITS THAN HE WOULD ADMIT—PREPARED TO PLAY A TRICK ON THE SOLEMN DETLING.



THIS PLACE IS LIKE A MORGUE! THIS'LL LIVEN THINGS UP!

DETLING'S THOUGHTS WERE FAR AWAY - THE FLAMES OF THE FIRE IN THE MESS WERE BRINGING BACK TO HIM MEMORIES OF THE FLAMES OF ANOTHER INCIDENT IN HIS LIFE.



HE HAD BEEN ACTING CONTROL OFFICER. A GREAT FRIEND OF HIS WAS COMING IN TO LAND WITH A DAMAGED UNDERCARRIAGE. HE HAD ASKED PERMISSION TO TAKE THE BOMBER UP AGAIN AND BALE OUT.

I FEEL IT YOUR DUTY TO TRY AND LAND THE AIRCRAFT... YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT. THE CRASH-WAGONS ARE WAITING... COME IN, R FOR ROGER, GOOD LUCK!



HIS MEMORY MOVED RELENTLESSLY ON... THE HAMPDEN HAD SKIDDED GROTESQUELY DOWN THE RUNWAY, AND BURST INTO A WHITE-HOT SHEET OF FLAMES...

IT'S NO GOOD, SIR, WE CAN'T GET NEAR!

OH, NO! TERRIBLE...

DETLING COULD ALMOST FEEL THE HEAT OF THE FLAMES — THE GLARE IN HIS EYES...

SUDDENLY HE GAVE A STRANGLING CRY AND FLUNG HIMSELF BACK IN HIS CHAIR AS REAL FLAMES LICKED AROUND HIS FACE...



COCKY HAD—FOR A PRANK—SET LIGHT TO THE NEWSPAPER IN DETLING'S HANDS. RAGING FURY BLAZED IN THE NAVIGATOR'S EYES...



BUT FOR JULIAN, IT WAS BREAKING POINT. HE SPRANG TO HIS FEET AND GAVE A SHOUT THAT STARTLED THE OTHER TWO INTO IMMOBILITY AND SILENCE.



AND IN THAT MOMENT OF ELECTRIFYING TENSION, THE TELEPHONE BELL RANG. THE CALL WAS FOR JULIAN...



AT THE BRIEFING, THE WHOLE CREW WERE TOLD EVERYTHING. THE GERMAN REACTOR WAS BUILT DEEP UNDERGROUND - HENCE CRUMBIE'S PROPOSED USE OF A DEEPLY EXPLODING BOMB. BUT THERE WAS ONE PART OF THE APPARATUS ABOVE GROUND - THE CAMOUFLAGED COOLING TOWER.

THE GERMANS COULD EASILY BUILD ANOTHER TOWER... BUT IT ACTS AS YOUR TARGET... LOOK AT IT WELL. NOTE THE TWO TREES, MEMORISE IT, SPARKS! YOU'VE GOT TO HIT THAT TOWER FROM EIGHTEEN THOUSAND FEET!



A FAST SPECIAL LONG-RANGE BEAUFIGHTER WAS TO GO AHEAD OF THE WELLINGTON TO DROP SMOKE MARKERS FOR THEM. DETLING WAS GIVEN THE RENDEZVOUS REFERENCE...

DO WE HAVE AN ESCORT, SIR?

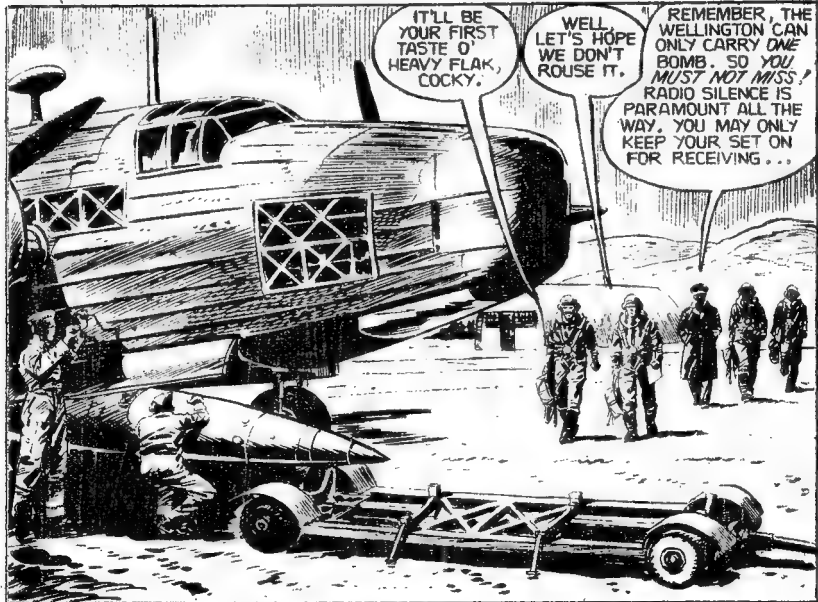
AFRAID NOT... THE PLACE IS STIFF WITH FLAK. A LARGE FORCE WOULD BE LOCATED COMING IN MILES AWAY... OUR ONLY CHANCE IS ONE BOMBER, WITH AN OUTSTANDING CREW LIKE YOURSELVES, DODGING IN THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS ALONE—WITHOUT BEING DETECTED UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT!



IT'LL BE YOUR FIRST TASTE O' HEAVY FLAK, COCKY.

WELL, LET'S HOPE WE DON'T ROUSE IT.

REMEMBER, THE WELLINGTON CAN ONLY CARRY ONE BOMB. SO YOU MUST NOT MISS! RADIO SILENCE IS PARAMOUNT ALL THE WAY. YOU MAY ONLY KEEP YOUR SET ON FOR RECEIVING...



Chapter 3. DESPERATE MISSION

FLYING LOW OVER THE SEA, THE CREW AT FIRST WERE STRANGELY SILENT, EACH WRAPPED IN HIS OWN THOUGHTS: MORGAN OF HIS GOGGLES, DETLING HIS MEMORIES, JULIAN HIS FEARS—AND COCKY IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HE WAS ON THE GREATEST JOB HE HAD EVER BEEN ASKED TO DO.



THEIR SUCCESS AND THEIR LIVES DEPENDED ON THEIR WORKING NOW AS A TEAM!

HALF AN HOUR PASSED AND COCKY ASKED IF THEY COULD SWITCH ON THE WIRELESS FOR THEIR ENTERTAINMENT. JULIAN THOUGHT IT NOT A BAD IDEA, AND ALLOWED IT.



NOW WHERE IN THE...? AH, GOT SOMETHING, CHAPS!

NAVIGATOR HERE... DON'T THINK IT'S A GOOD IDEA, SKIPPER! WE SHAN'T HEAR EACH OTHER SPEAK—BECAUSE OF THE MUSIC.



JULIAN FLUNG THE WELLINGTON INTO A STEEP BANK BACK TOWARDS THE E-BOAT.

IF CHARLIE'S AS GOOD AS THEY SAY... HE'LL SHOOT THEM ALL UP IN ONE BURST.

THEY'RE ALL YOURS, CHARLIE! A FULL BAG NOW!



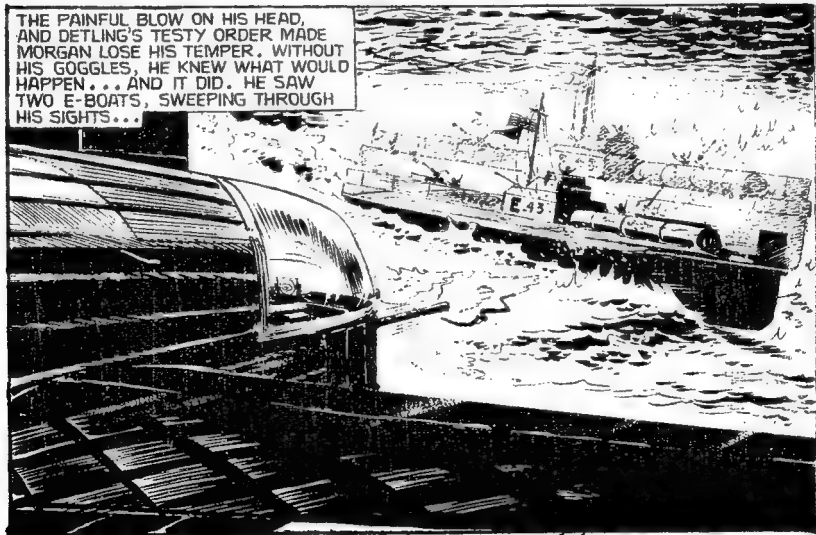
BUT THE SUDDENNESS OF JULIAN'S TURN CAUGHT CHARLIE UNAWARES. HE WAS FLUNG AGAINST THE SIDE OF HIS TURRET— AND HIS PRECIOUS GOGGLES WERE SMASHED.

BLINKING HECK! I'VE BROKEN MY GOGGLES!

DARN YOUR GOGGLES, MORGAN! TAKE YOUR TARGET.



THE PAINFUL BLOW ON HIS HEAD, AND DETLING'S TESTY ORDER MADE MORGAN LOSE HIS TEMPER. WITHOUT HIS GOGGLES, HE KNEW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN... AND IT DID. HE SAW TWO E-BOATS, SWEEPING THROUGH HIS SIGHTS...



A TORNADO OF STEEL SWEEPED THE E-BOAT'S DECK, BUT MORGAN WAS AIMING ALMOST BY GUESSWORK. AS THE WELLINGTON PULLED AWAY, JULIAN ASKED IF HE HAD GOT THEM ALL.

I-I THINK SO, SKIPPER.

WELL, WE CAN'T HANG AROUND HERE. LET'S HOPE YOU DID... OR WE MAY BE IN FOR THE HOTTEST RECEPTION ANY OF US HAVE EVER HAD.

IN FACT, MOST OF THE E-BOAT'S CREW SURVIVED UNHURT... THEY WERE ALREADY RADIOING THE RESULT OF THE ENCOUNTER.

THE PIG-DOG ENGLANDERS! QUICK, RADIO THEIR COURSE...

ENEMY BOMBER PROCEEDING ON COURSE ZERO FOUR SIX... HEADING FOR NORWAY...



AS THEY SPED ON AGAIN, WITH SO MUCH AT STAKE, COCKY'S REACTION WAS TO TAKE IT OUT OF POOR CHARLIE.

IF THAT FOOL SCOTSMAN HAS DICED US ALL UP... JUST AS WE'RE HITTING NORWAY FOR THE BIGGEST TARGET OF THE WAR...

CUT IT OUT, COCKY! I'M SURE TAIL-END CHARLIE DID HIS BEST... YOU TALK TOO MUCH!

BUT IT WAS AT THAT MOMENT THAT DETLING BECAME CONSCIOUS OF A FAMILIAR HUM IN HIS EAR-PHONES... FOR A MOMENT HE WAS PUZZLED. THEN SUDDENLY, THE TRUTH STRUCK HIM LIKE A THUNDERBOLT.

GOOD GRIEF...! THE TRANSMISSION SWITCH IS ON! EVERYTHING WE'VE SAID HAS GONE OUT ON THE AIR!

COCKY PARKER, IN TRYING TO TURN OFF THE MUSIC IN A HURRY—HAD EVIDENTLY KNOCKED THE TRANSMITTER SWITCH ON.

FOR A MOMENT THERE WAS A HORRIFIED SILENCE. THEN JULIAN ROUNDED ON COCKY FURIOUSLY...

YOU BLITHERING IDIOT, MICK! IF ANYONE HAS DICED US UP—YOU HAVE! NOW GET DOWN THERE, AND KEEP QUIET!

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, SKIPPER.

PERHAPS IT WAS JUST AS WELL THEY DID NOT KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT ALREADY THERE WAS CONSERVATION IN A GERMAN CONTROL STATION NOT A HUNDRED MILES AWAY.

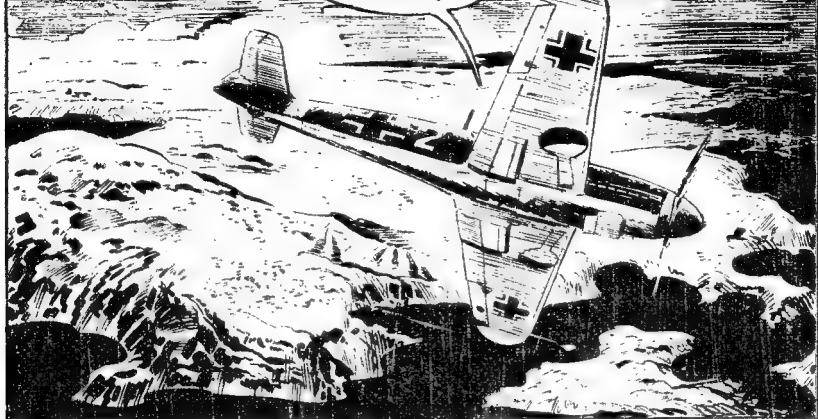
... AND A SINGLE BOMBER REPORTED HEADING FOR TROHELM FIORD — THE TWO TIE-UP, HERR COLONEL!

HERR LEUTNANT! HAVE ALL THE GUNS ALERTED IN THE VERY TOP SECRET AREA... AND ONE MOMENT—ANOTHER THING...



THE CONTROL COMMANDANT REMEMBERED A MESSERSCHMITT FIGHTER THAT WAS OUT ON PATROL AHEAD OF THE REPORTED POSITION OF THE WELLINGTON.

HAWK ZERO
FOUR CONTROL -
TURNING TO
INVESTIGATE AND
ATTACK!



THE WELLINGTON'S CREW SAW THE COAST FLASH PAST - AND ROARED ON, BANKING LOW UP A TWISTING FIORD - APPARENTLY WITHOUT BEING SEEN. IT WAS DETLING WHO MUST PLOT THEM ON TO THEIR TARGET...

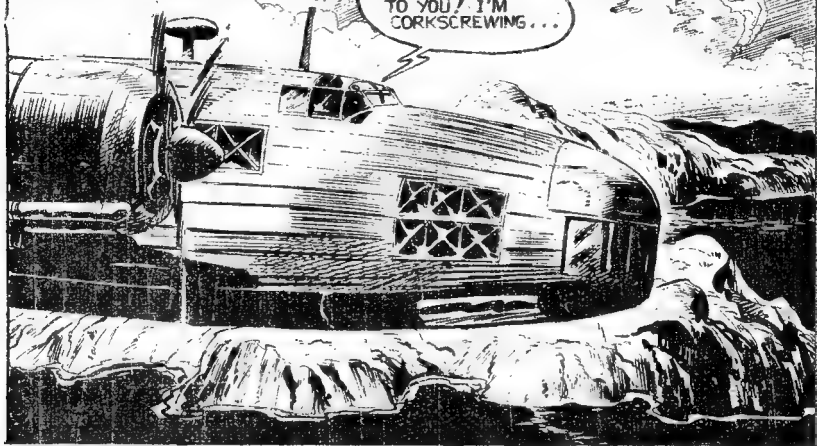
NOW ON
ZERO THREE
EIGHT...
AIRSPEED TWO-
FOUR-SEVEN
...OVER.

ROGER!
WE JUMP OVER
INTO THE NEXT
VALLEY AFTER
THREE MILES,
SKIPPER!



A MOMENT LATER, JULIAN SUDDENLY SPOTTED A SPECK IN THE SKY. IT WAS GROWING BIGGER EVERY SECOND.

BANDIT!
TEN O'CLOCK!
HE'S SEEN US!
MORGAN, IT'S UP
TO YOU! I'M
CORKSCREWING...



COCKY SUDDENLY REALISED WHAT ONLY ONE TURRET MEANT. THEIR LIVES WERE VIRTUALLY IN THE REAR GUNNER'S HANDS AND THE BOMB-AIMER FELT A WAVE OF RELIEF NOT TO HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY HIMSELF.

COCKY HERE,
CHARLIE! SORRY
I MADE YOU ANGRY
BEFORE - MUST HAVE
PUT YOU OFF YOUR
AIM! TAKE YOUR TIME
- YOU'LL DO IT!
GOOD LUCK!

THANKS,
COCKY LAD!
I'LL DO MY
BEST!



THE REAR GUN TURRET TURNED TO MEET THE ONCOMING FIGHTER AS JULIAN CORKSCREWED DOWN THE PRECIPITOUS VALLEY AT FULL THROTTLE.

I'VE GOT TO JUMP THE NEXT RIDGE AT TREE-TOP HEIGHT... GET HIM BEFORE THEN — WHILE WE HAVE THE ADVANTAGE.



ALL AT ONCE, CHARLIE FELT STRANGELY COOL... AND TO HIS SURPRISE...



ONE — CLEAR — ME — 109 HUNG FOR A MOMENT IN HIS SIGHTS — AND HE SQUEEZED THE TRIGGERS.



BUT SUDDENLY A BRIGHT FLASH OF FLAME SPRANG UP UNDER THE NAVIGATOR'S TABLE AND DETLING LEAPT TO HIS FEET WITH A FRIGHTENED YELL, WAVING HIS ARMS FRANTICALLY.

FIRE!
FIRE! HELP
FOR PETE'S
SAKE!

NORMALLY SO SELF-ASSURED, THE NAVIGATOR WAS ALMOST HYSTERICAL.

NEAR PANIC SEIZED THE CREW UNTIL COCKY SCRAMBLED AFT, GRABBED A FIRE-EXTINGUISHER — AND SET ABOUT THE FLAMES.

AAGH!
WE'LL ALL
BE BURNED
ALIVE!



THE BOMB-
AIMER SOON
HAD THE FIRE
UNDER CONTROL.

SORRY, CHAPS,
TOOK ME
UNAWARES...
DON'T KNOW
WHAT CAME
OVER ME.

A SHORT IN THE
WIRING, SKIP... A
SHELL NICKED IT! YOU
KNOW, I THOUGHT DETLING
WAS AFRAID OF NOTHING.
BUT I BELIEVE HE'S
AFRAID OF FIRE.



BUT DETLING HOTLY DENIED IT—IN FACT,
HE HAD HARDLY REALISED IT HIMSELF.

HE'S, YOU
KNOW, SKIP!

LEAVE HIM ALONE!
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE
YOUR FEET SUDDENLY TO
GO UP IN FLAMES? ANYWAY
IT PUT ME OFF... I WANT
A NEW COURSE, NAVIGATOR.
GET CRACKING—OR WE'LL
GET LOST.



BUT KEN DETLING WAS CONSIDERABLY
SHAKEN BY THE INCIDENT—HE MADE A
MISTAKE IN HIS NEXT CALCULATION—
THE FIRST MISTAKE HE HAD EVER
MADE... AND IT WAS GOING TO COST
THEM DEARLY.

Chapter 1. DOUBLE TARGET

JULIAN'S EYES SEARCHED THE SKY FOR THE BEAUFIGHTER—BUT IN VAIN. HE ORDERED DETLING TO RE-CHECK THE COURSE—AND A MOMENT LATER, THE NAVIGATOR GAVE A STRANGLED GASP OF HORROR...

G-GREAT HEAVENS! I WAS WRONG—I CALCULATED FIVE DEGREES INSTEAD OF FIFTEEN!

WHAT? THEN WE'RE LOST!



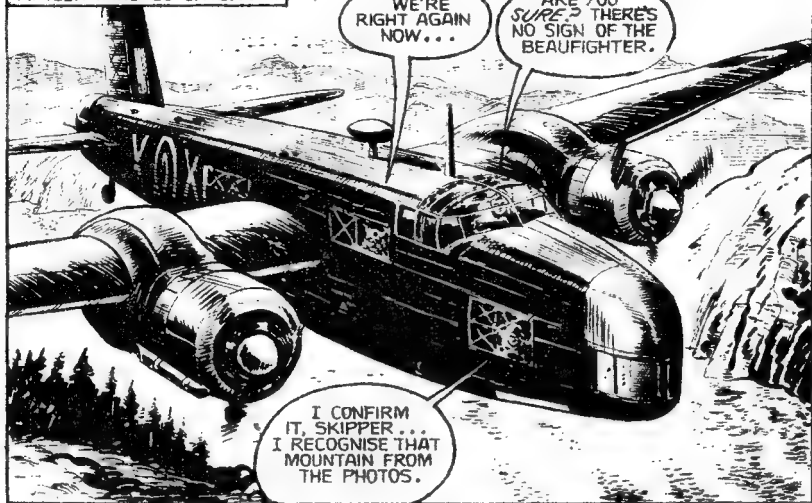
MEANWHILE, THE BEAUFIGHTER WAS CIRCLING ABOVE THE CORRECT RENDEZVOUS POINT...

STILL NO SIGN OF THEM AND OUR FUEL'S GETTING LOW! WE'LL HAVE TO GO AHEAD AND DROP OUR MARKERS—OR WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT BACK.

I'M AFRAID SO, SKIPPER. IT'LL LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG! THE OTHERS WILL FLY INTO A FULL ALERT... IF THEY HAVEN'T BEEN SHOT DOWN ALREADY!



FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER...



DESPERATELY JULIAN WEIGHED THE ALTERNATIVES. THE BEAUFIGHTER HAD EITHER GONE ON AHEAD - OR BEEN SHOT DOWN. BUT WHICH? IT WAS DETLING'S FORETHOUGHT THAT CAME TO HIS RESCUE...

WE CAN'T HOPE TO BOMB ACCURATELY FROM EIGHTEEN THOUSAND FEET WITHOUT MARKERS.



JULIAN GAVE A SHOUT OF RELIEF...

WHAT A MAN!
THEN LET'S GO
ACTION STATIONS,
COCKY!

WOW! WE'RE
NOT PAID FOR THIS
PART OF THE JOB. IF
WE GET THIS CRATE
DOWN THROUGH FLAK
AND UP AGAIN, WE'LL
BE BLOOMING
LUCKY!

AS THEY FLEW TOWARDS THE TARGET
AREA, LIGHT FLAK BEGAN TO BURST
AROUND THEM.

FLAK, EH!
WE MUST BE GETTING
WARM! KEEP YOUR
EYES SKINNED FOR
THE TOWER,
COCKY!

WITH EVERY SECOND, THE FLAK BECAME HEAVIER. THE NOISE WAS INDESCRIBABLE. EVERY MAN STEELED HIMSELF FOR THE ORDEAL AHEAD.

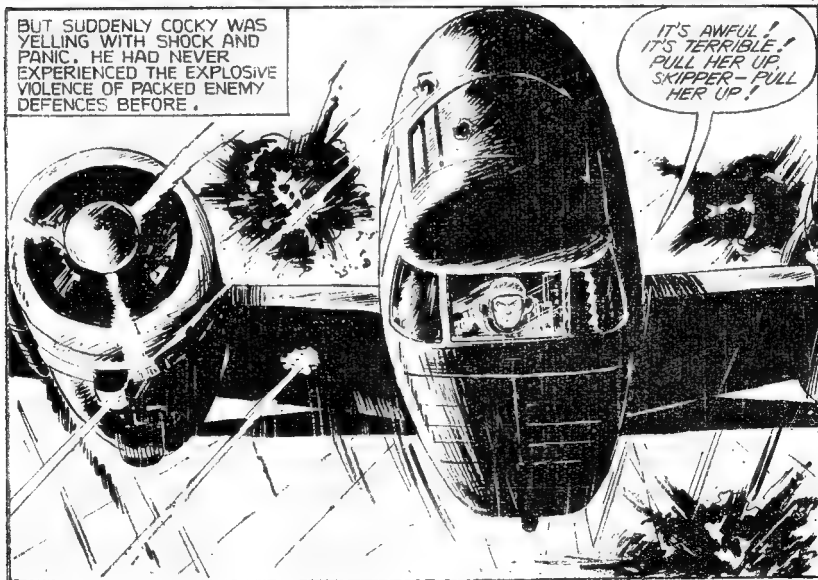
HOW DO YE LIKE IT, COCKY?

ADUUUCH!
IT'S MOSTLY ABOVE US - WELL FLOWN, JULIAN!



BUT SUDDENLY COCKY WAS YELLING WITH SHOCK AND PANIC. HE HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED THE EXPLOSIVE VIOLENCE OF PACKED ENEMY DEFENCES BEFORE.

IT'S AWFUL!
IT'S TERRIBLE!
PULL HER UP!
SKIPPER - PULL
HER UP!



COCKY'S SHOUTS DINNED IN EVERYONE'S EARS AS JULIAN HELD THE WELLINGTON LOW, FIGHTING DOWN HIS OWN ALMOST OVERPOWERING INSTINCT TO BREAK AWAY FROM THE DEADLY FLAK— BUT SOMETHING MADE HIM HOLD ON.



SOMEHOW THE PILOT GASPED OUT A FEW WORDS OF RE-ASSURANCE TO THE BOMB-AIMER...

STICK IT, COCKY!
I'M SCARED OUT OF MY
WITS, TOO. AND IT'S
WORSE EVERY
TIME...



COCKY SNATCHED AT JULIAN'S FRANK ADMISSION LIKE A DROWNING MAN SNATCHES AT A ROPE. BUT HIS VOICE WAS STILL SHAKY...

YOU SCARED, TOO, SKIPPER? I NEVER REALISED IT! SORRY, CHAPS, FIRST TIME AND ALL THAT — I CAN TAKE IT IF YOU CAN.

CHARLIE HERE... DON'T WORRY, COCKY! WE'LL GET IT!



SUDDENLY...

TARGET AHEAD! I SEE IT — NO, WAIT, COCKY — THERE ARE NO TREES BESIDE IT!

SO WHAT! THEY'VE CUT THEM DOWN! I'M NEVER WRONG ABOUT A TARGET — IT'S MY JOB!



THEY ROARED LOW
OVER THE TOWER,
DROPPING THEIR
MARKERS....



JULIAN KEPT THE BOMBER LOW FOR ANOTHER
TWO OR THREE MILES - THEN HAULED BACK
ON THE STICK. HE CLIMBED STEADILY WITH
EVERYTHING THE ENGINES COULD GIVE HIM....

I'LL SAY THIS,
SKIPPER... YOU'VE
GOT WHAT IT TAKES!
IT'S YOU THAT'S GOT
US THIS FAR.



MORGAN'S WORDS OVER THE INTERCOM
STRANGELY BEWILDERED JULIAN.

YOU'RE THE BEST O' THE LOT OF
US... IT'S YOU THAT'S KEPT US
TOGETHER, AND PULLED EACH
O' US THRU'!



NO ONE HAD EVER SAID ANYTHING
LIKE THAT TO JULIAN AND IT
WAS ONLY THEN THAT HE BEGAN TO
REALISE THAT HE *HAD* GOT COURAGE.

IT WAS CHARLIE MORGAN, LOOKING DOWN AS THEY CLIMBED STEEPLY, WHO FIRST NOTICED TWO SETS OF SMOKE FLARES FAR BELOW.

GREAT SCOTT! MY DOUBLE VISION'S COME BACK AGAIN! T-TWO MARKERS!



BUT HIS EYES WERE NOT DECEIVING HIM. THEY WERE UP AT EIGHTEEN THOUSAND FEET, RUNNING IN TO BOMB AND SUDDENLY COCKY SAW THEM, TOO.



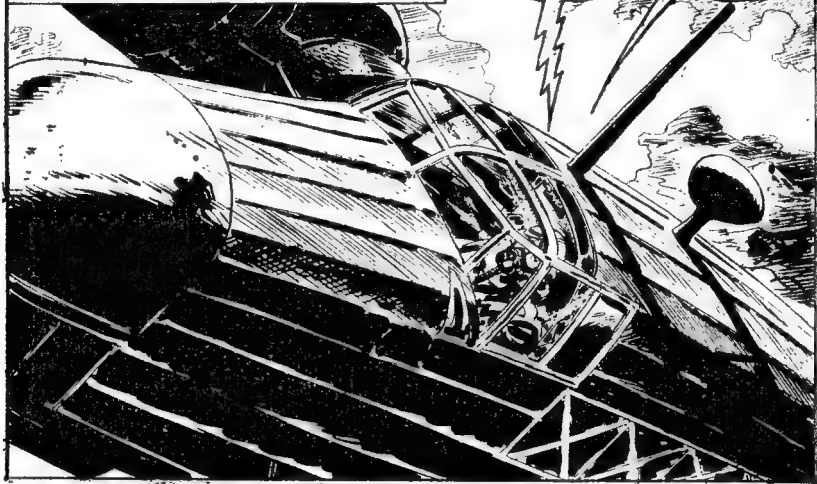
STEADY AS YOU GO, SKIPPER... JUST COMING INTO 'HE - LUMME! AM I GOING CRAZY?

WHAT IS IT, COCKY?

THE TRUTH HIT COCKY IN A FLASH.. THE BEAUFIGHTER HAD BEEN IN FIRST, AND HAD FOUND SOMETHING ELSE TO MARK. COCKY'S FIRST IMPULSE WAS TO DECLARE THE OTHER'S MARKER TO BE WRONG — HE REMEMBERED THE DESPERATE IMPORTANCE OF THE MISSION, AND SWALLOWED HIS PRIDE.

SKIPPER,
THERE ARE TWO
MARKERS! I THINK
I'VE MADE A
MISTAKE!

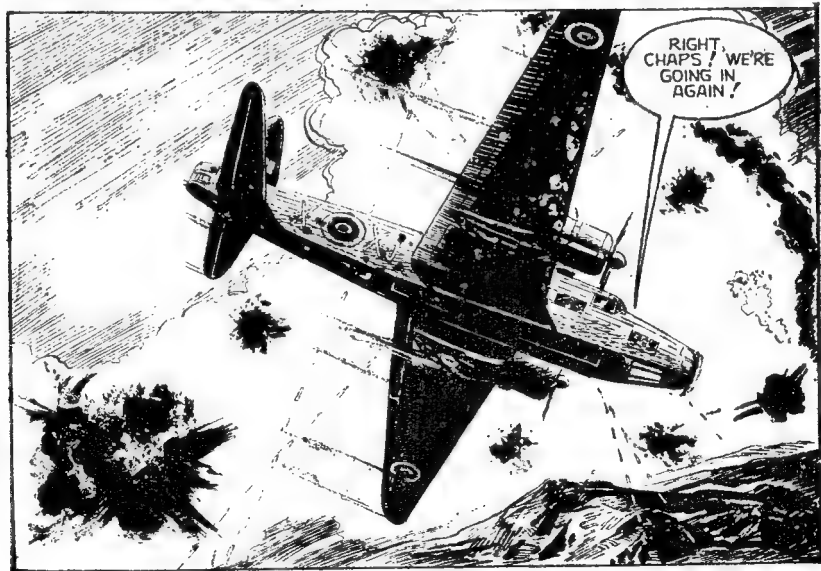
WHAT!
YOU, COCKY?
DON'T TELL ME
THAT!



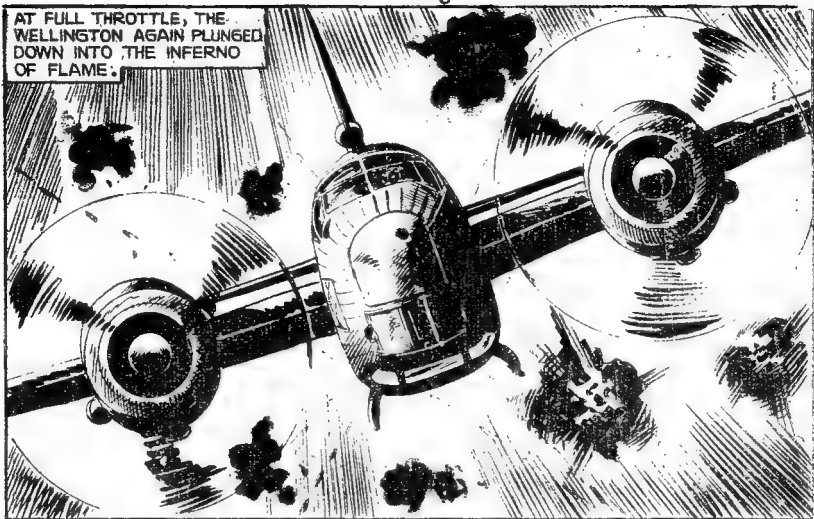
I'VE BEEN
THINKING, SKIPPER
... YOU MAY HAVE
BEEN RIGHT ABOUT
THE TREES... THERE
MAY BE TWO TOWERS,
AND THE ONE WE
MARKED A
FAKE.

WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT
IT MEANS THEN, DON'T
YOU? GOING DOWN INTO
THE FLAK AGAIN TO
INVESTIGATE — WE'VE
BEEN LUCKY ONCE,
BUT...





AT FULL THROTTLE, THE WELLINGTON AGAIN PLUNGED DOWN INTO THE INFERNO OF FLAME.



TEN TERRIFYING SECONDS LATER, COCKY RECOGNISED THE CORRECT TARGET...

SKIPPER! WE WERE WRONG... AND THE BEAUFIGHTER WAS RIGHT!

I'M PULLING UP! HANG ON LIKE GRIM DEATH, LADS!



THEY FELT THE TREBLED GRAVITY TEAR AT THEIR BODIES—THEN, SOAKED WITH PERSPIRATION, AND SHAKING ALL OVER THEY WERE SOARING INTO CLEAR SKY...

WE'RE ABOVE THE WORST NOW!

READY, COCKY—GOING INTO THE BOMB RUN NOW!



18,000 FEET... THEY WERE ON THE RUN IN FOR THE SECOND TIME. WITH METICULOUS DIRECTIONS COCKY GUIDED JULIAN OVER THE TARGET. SUDDENLY THEY ALL FELT THE AIRCRAFT LEAP INTO THE AIR, AS THE GREAT BOMB DROPPED AWAY...

BOMB
AWAY!

KEN AND COCKY!
WATCH FOR THE UPHEAVAL!
AND TAKE YOUR PHOTOS!
THEN WE'LL TRY FOR
HOME...



Aces High

ALL THE BRITISH AIRMEN SAW OF THEIR WORK WAS A VAGUE BULGING OF THE GROUND FAR, FAR BELOW. IT WAS STRANGELY DISAPPOINTING BUT THE EFFECTS IN THE UNDERGROUND LABORATORY WERE DEVASTATING.



THE WELLINGTON'S ACE CREW HAD SUCCEEDED IN ITS MISSION—BUT THEIR MISTAKES AND CONSEQUENT DELAYS HAD COST THE GALLANT BEAUFIGHTER TOO MUCH FUEL TO RETURN...

STAND BY FOR
CRASH LANDING—
DITCHING NOW!



Chapter 5. PHOTO FINISH

THE BATTERED BOMBER TURNED FOR HOME, SOON LEAVING THE FLAK-FILLED SKIES OVER THE TARGET FAR BEHIND. THE CREW WERE STRANGELY SILENT, EACH ALONE WITH HIS OWN THOUGHTS... FOR EACH WAS A DIFFERENT MAN FROM WHEN HE HAD SET OUT. AT LAST, THEY APPROACHED THE ENGLISH COAST...

DON'T FORGET TO PUT THE WHEELS DOWN, SKIPPER, FOR CROSSING THE COAST? ... PITY IF WE GOT MISTAKEN BY OUR OWN CHAPS - AFTER ALL THIS!

THANKS, KEN! PUTTING THEM DOWN NOW.

SUDDENLY, CHARLIE IN THE TAIL TURRET SPOTTED A YELLOW DINGHY IN THE SEA...

HEY, SKIPPER! THERE'S A WEE DINGHY BACK HERE TO PORT. ONE OF OURS, I'M THINKING - I CAN SEE THE TAIL OF THE PLANE STICKING OUT O' THE WATER.



JULIAN TURNED THE BOMBER IN A TIGHT CIRCLE AND THEY RECOGNISED WITH AMAZEEMENT THE NUMBER ON THE RUDDER OF THE SINKING AIRCRAFT. IT WAS THEIR OWN LOST BEAUFIGHTER.

TAKE THEIR POSITION, KEN... AND RADIO TO AIRSEA RESCUE, COCKY! THUMBS UP, AND WE'LL HAVE TO LEAVE THEM.

HOLD IT SKIPPER! THEY'RE TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING... SOMETHING WRONG UNDERNEATH!



IT WAS CHARLIE WHO HAD THE CLEARNESS OF SIGHT TO SEE THAT THE TWO MEN WERE SIGNALLING, NOT WAVING.

KEN DETLING GOT DOWN AND PEERED THROUGH A JAGGED FLAK HOLE IN THE CORNER OF THE FUSELAGE.

GOOD GRIEF! THE WHOLE UNDERCART'S GONE ON THIS SIDE!

WOW! MUST HAVE BEEN THE FLAK!



ALREADY TESTED
ALMOST BEYOND
ENDURANCE, AND
YET STILL SURVIVED,
THE CREW MUST
FACE A NEW ORDEAL.
THEY WERE CIRCLING
BASE...

SKIPPER!
SKIPPER!
LET'S BALE
OUT, MAN!

REMEMBER,
KEN - WE'VE GOT
THE BLINKING PHOTOS
ON BOARD!

CHARLIE'S
RIGHT, KEN!
WE'VE GOT TO
TAKE THE OLD
BUS DOWN.



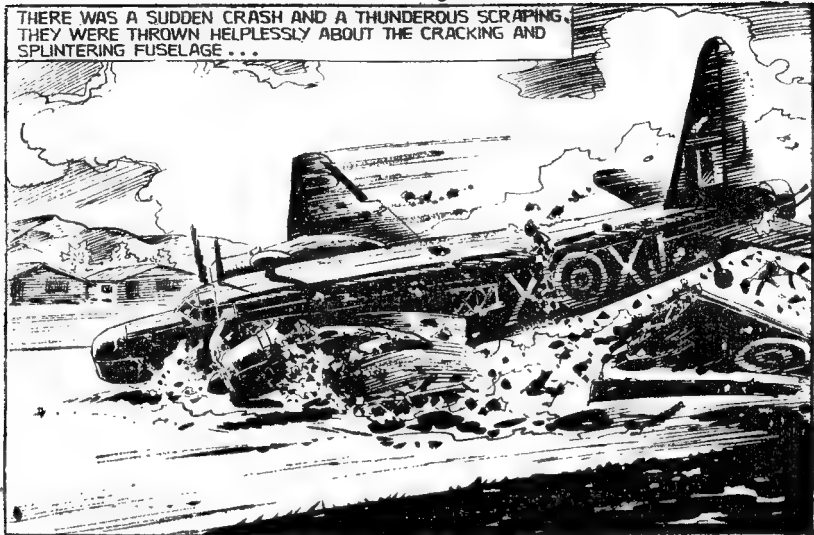
JULIAN FELT NO FEAR AS HE
APPROACHED THE AIRFIELD AND
DETLING WAS NOT SO MUCH
AFRAID - AS BELIEVING THAT
THIS AT LAST WAS HIS
PERSONAL NEMESIS. HIS
FRIEND HAD ONCE BEEN
KILLED THIS WAY, AND IT
HAD BEEN DETLING'S OWN
DOING.

ALL CREW!
DITCHING
STATIONS!
SWITCHING OFF
NOW, CONTROL!

SO THIS IS
IT! I'VE HAD
IT COMING
A LONG
TIME.



THERE WAS A SUDDEN CRASH AND A THUNDEROUS SCRAPPING. THEY WERE THROWN HELPLESSLY ABOUT THE CRACKING AND SPLINTERING FUSELAGE...



THE WRECKED BOMBER SLITHERED AND SHUDDERED TO A DUST ENVELOPED STANDSTILL. FOR AN EERIE MOMENT THERE WAS SILENCE— THEN THE FIRE BROKE OUT. DETLING GRABBED HIS CAMERA, AND TORE FRANTICALLY AT THE BROKEN WALL...



GOT THE CAMERA, COCKY!
COCKY...

GREAT HEAVENS!
COCKY'S STILL INSIDE!





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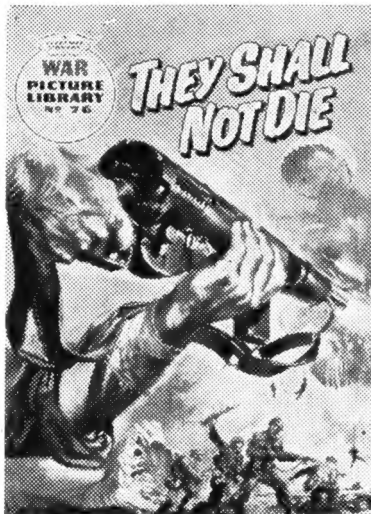
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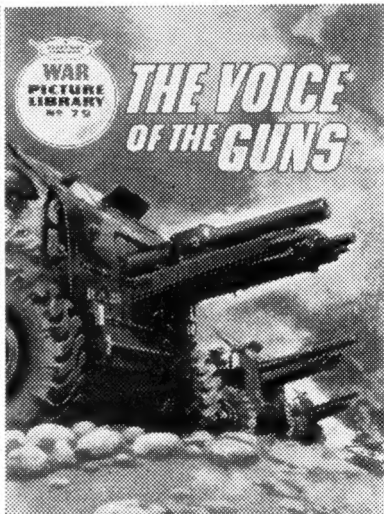
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